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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 NOUAKCHOTT 000332

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SUBJECT: MEETINGS WITH NEW PRO-COUP POLITICAL PARTIES

REF: NOUAKCHOTT 188

Classified By: Ambassador Mark M. Boulware for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: PolOff and PolAsst met with two different breeds of new pro-coup political parties. Union Pour la Republique (UPR), intimately connected with coup leader and now presidential candidate Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz, sees the June 6 election as an opportunity to return to constitutional order and dismisses coup detractors as a minority that is attempting to tyrannize the majority. Rassemblement du Peuple Mauritanien (RDPM), headed by former Taya strong-man Louleid Ould Weddad, supports the coup but has refused to unconditionally back Aziz and is increasingly taking its distance from him. Its leaders say they want to help broker a consensual agreement and have publicly called for delaying elections. End summary.

UPR: THE PARTY OF THE PARLIAMENTARIAN MAJORITY

¶2. (C) PolOff and PolAsst met May 13 with Mohamed Aly Cherif, parliamentarian and vice-president of the newly created UPR political party, of which coup leader and now presidential candidate Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz is "interim" president. (Comment: It is widely known that UPR is Aziz's party but Aziz is running as an independent candidate and UPR has named him "interim" president with the intention of confirming him as president after the election. Many believe UPR will become a monolithic state party in Ould Taya's PRDS fashion once Aziz becomes president. End comment.) Cherif was accompanied by National Assembly Deputy and President of the Assembly's External Relations Commission Taleb Ould Sidi Ould Khalifa. Almost thirty minutes into the meeting, the men were joined by Abdallah Hormatallah, UPR's communications officer. Note: In addition, Hormatallah works as communications officer for Aziz's presidential campaign. End note.

¶3. (C) Cherif and Khalifa seemed all too pleased to welcome EmbOffs. Cherif opened the meeting by stating that he only regretted EmbOffs had not come to see him sooner. He went on to explain that UPR was created on May 5 by a group of independent majority parliamentarians who, for the most part, were former members of President Abdallahi's defunct

PNDD-ADIL party. According to Cherif, 41 out of 95 deputies are UPR members and only five former PNDD-ADIL members refused to join UPR. Comment: Former PNDD-ADIL members who refused to join UPR formed RDPM under Ould Weddad's presidency. End comment.

14. (C) Cherif and Khalifa insisted on providing EmbOffs with a comprehensive history of President Sidi Ould Cheikh Abdallahi's political mistakes, aimed at justifying their support for the coup. They accused Abdallahi of betraying his own party, PNDD-ADIL, by not granting ministerial positions to party members, "even though we supported him in everything." They further accused him of alienating his parliamentary majority by including Mohamed Ould Maouloud's UFP and Jemil Ould Mansour's Tawassoul parties in Prime Minister Waghef's government. Cherif stated these two parties were given "too much importance." Cherif reminded EmbOffs that UFP and Tawassoul, now "the backbone of the FNDD," were, respectively, a Marxist and Islamic party. According to Cherif, UFP and Tawassoul "had not been elected by the people but wanted to control the government." Cherif declared they did not mind UFP's entrance in the government as much as Tawassoul's. He stressed that Mansour had been in contact with "Islamist leaders" without naming names. He alleged that Mansour's party had spent over 3 million dollars campaigning during the 2006 National Assembly elections and hinted that this was laundered money coming from outside sources. Cherif said that the inclusion of Islamists in the government, something Abdallahi had promoted in the name of democratic representation, had made the parliamentary

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majority very uneasy. Comment: By condemning UFP and Tawassoul, Cherif was playing the now-familiar "extremist" card so often used by coup supporters. He seemed to imply the U.S. and Jemil Ould Mansour made for strange bedfellows. End comment.

15. (C) Cherif also highlighted Abdallahi's mismanagement of the military. He explained that after being "on good terms with the Generals," Abdallahi brought the coup upon himself by firing all of them at once and replacing them with lower ranking colonels. In Cherif's view, if Abdallahi suspected General Aziz of plotting against him, he should have fired General Aziz and not the others. Instead, Abdallahi's decision "unleashed chaos" within the military and created the conditions for a very dangerous imbalance in the country.

16. (C) Cherif was keen to dispel rumors that UPR party members were the military's supporters. "We can't be accused of being pawns" for the military, he asserted. He stressed that it was the military that supported President Abdallahi until May 2008 and not the "independents."

17. (C) Cherif stated that Waghef was a "disastrous" Prime Minister with no legitimacy as he was not a politician and had not been elected by the people. Waghef is in jail for corruption rather than for political reasons, stressed Cherif. Other FNDD leaders like Boidiel Ould Houmeid and Ahmed Ould Sidi Baba were individuals who had been defeated in the elections and had no popular legitimacy. He said he could not understand how Abdallahi could have chosen these people to be part of his government and head his party.

18. (C) Regarding accusations that majority parliamentarians were "extremists" who wanted to sever relations with Israel, Cherif declared himself a supporter of ties with Israel but said he opposed "Israeli extremism." According to him, Israel had crossed the line by attacking Gaza, leaving Mauritania no option but to "freeze" relations. Cherif was quick to point out that those relations had not been "cut" but suspended. Comment: Cherif's comments suggest that Mauritians intend to continue using relations with Israel as a bargaining chip with the U.S. End comment.

19. (C) PolOff asked Cherif how UPR interpreted the fact

that none of the major parties wanted to participate in the election and how UPR intended to move the country forward after June 6. Cherif responded that for UPR, the opposition is a minority that does not represent the true voice of Mauritians. Cherif dismissed Ahmed Ould Daddah's RFD as a party "in the process of disintegrating." He stated RFD had already lost four deputies and would most likely lose two or three more in the next weeks. He declared himself surprised that RFD was now opposing the June 6 election because they had originally called for elections to be held as soon as possible. As for the FNDD, Cherif said they had rejected all opportunities for dialogue and now were accusing the majority of acting unilaterally. He stated the FNDD had refused to participate in the Etats Generaux ("National Dialogue on Democracy"), in the Qadhafi mediation, and in the Senegalese mediation. They were a typical example of the "minority that rejects the law of the majority" and all they wanted was to perpetuate the crisis.

¶10. (C) Cherif proceeded to sing the praises of the United States. He drew frequent parallels between President Obama and President Kennedy. He declared himself open to dialogue and to U.S. advice in these difficult times as the U.S. is an important Mauritanian partner. He invited PolOff to keep in touch and called the meeting "an ice-breaker" that should lead to further exchanges. Nevertheless, he pointed out that our policy in Mauritania had come to further "upset" the situation in a context that was already "rotten."

¶11. (C) At PolAsst's request Cherif explained the party's platform would center on "restoring Mauritanian democracy" after the June 6 elections and increasing security and

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stability in order to fight corruption and poverty. When PolOff asked about Aziz's plans to dissolve the National Assembly and eliminate the Senate, Cherif stepped back from Aziz by responding that Aziz was an independent candidate and had his own platform.

¶12. (C) In response to PolAsst's observation that Mauritania seemed to be moving closer to Iran and Libya, he responded that the U.S. was also getting closer to those countries. He stated he did not see a problem with Mauritania's newfound friendship with these countries as Mauritania is a sovereign country and practices a moderate Islam.

¶13. (C) Khalifa ended the meeting by calling on the U.S. to understand that democracy meant respecting the wishes of the majority and that the majority of parliamentarians were pro-coup. He also stated that mayors, as elected officials, are the people's representatives. Most mayors, according to him, are pro-coup. Finally, he reminded the U.S. that disorder and crisis could not breed development and security. Cherif said he would like to come to the U.S. if visa sanctions were not applied against him.

RDPM: FURTHER DISTANCING THEMSELVES FROM AZIZ

¶14. (C) PolOff and PolAsst met with RDPM party president and parliamentarian Louleid Ould Weddad and parliamentarian Baba Ould Sidi at the new and affluent RDPM headquarters. PolOff and PolAsst had previously met with these men in March, when they announced they wanted to create a party that, while supporting Aziz, would maintain its distance from the state party the General was planning to create (see Reftel). Comment: Many Mauritians in political circles believe that Ould Weddad's unwillingness to back Aziz is a sign that the General is weak. Ould Weddad, Ould Taya's gate-keeper, has a reputation for being a sly politician who is always on the right side of power. Furthermore, he is rumored to be extremely rich, a result of his many years with Taya. LES state that he owns a large villa in Nouakchott,

and an equally luxurious villa in his hometown of Ouadane.
End comment.

¶15. (C) Ould Weddad declared his party was actively approaching political actors to convince them to find a solution. His party felt it would be wise to hold off on the elections until a consensus had been reached, and agreed that elections as currently planned wouldn't magically solve everything. Note: The party recently published a press release openly calling for a delay in elections. End note. He said he still had hopes the election date would be changed and that he would work towards that goal "until the last minute." When PolOff asked him if they planned to boycott the election if it took place on June 6, he refused to expound on the party's strategy and stated they would think about it once it became obvious that no agreement could be reached.

¶16. (C) Ould Weddad's questions revealed more about what preoccupies him than his actual statements. He wanted to know if PolOff knew anything about the FNDD's willingness to participate in the Senegalese mediation, if a change in the election date would satisfy the FNDD, and what the international community position in the post-election period would be. Ould Sidi and Ould Weddad seemed surprised when PolOff said that the main bone of contention was not the actual election date but the General's unilateral agenda.

¶17. (C) Comment: It is interesting that UPR leaders were so keen about maintaining a semblance of distance from Aziz and the military when everybody knows they are one and the same. Ironically, their accusations of Abdallahi spreading the wealth among various political parties at the expense of his own party appears to be Aziz's emerging strategy. By

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running as an independent candidate, Aziz can have a freer hand to distribute the spoils of government to whomever he likes. As for Ould Weddad and RDPM members, it seems that the rats are poised to jump off the Aziz ship, which is surprising as he is headed towards a virtually assured electoral victory on June 6. In fact, when Aziz met with "his" parliamentary majority May 13, Weddad and the RDPM boycotted the meeting, in another sign of their tepid support for him. End comment.
BOULWARE